

Continuing in week 2 with our BBMI (Body → Breath → Mind → Intention) meditation practice, today we'll take a special focus on our Breath. As an introduction, please note these 3 points:

1. We humans appear to have an intuitive sense of the deep connection between inner and outer winds (our breath, and the wind in the trees) and the subtle reality of Spirit in our personal experience. We see this connection in languages across cultures, continents and enduring world religions:
  - in biblical Greek *pneuma* means both wind/breath and Spirit (e.g., check out the pun expressed in John 3:8);
  - in biblical Hebrew *ruach* means both wind and spirit;
  - in Sanskrit *prana* can mean both breath and life force/animus/spirit;
  - similarly, in Tibetan *lung* can mean both breath/wind and subtle energy in our spiritual bodies; and
  - similar notions exist in Chinese traditions, with *Chi*, as in Tai-Chi practices.
2. With this intuitive connection in mind, we can cultivate various intentional breathing practices to open us up to experiences of the presence of God's spirit inside and surrounding us. We'll share a few of these practices together in today's guided meditation.
3. In terms of our total well-being – physical, emotional, mental, spiritual – how we breathe really matters:
  - Oxygen is literally food/nourishment for our cells, and deep slow breathing is physically healthy, especially at a time when respiratory resilience may be critical.
  - On a mental/emotional level, Eastern spiritual traditions use the metaphor of a horse-and-rider for breath-and-mind/emotions: as the horse goes, so goes the rider and vice-versa. When our emotions are agitated (fear, anxiety, anger), so is our breathing; that's why everyone intuitively grasps "slow down and take 3 deep breaths". We can use the fact of this parallel activity (breath and mind work in tandem) to control/modulate our thoughts and emotions – it's much easier to control our breath than it is to control our emotions (by force of will in the present moment). "Just stop being angry/anxious/jealous". Yeah, right, good luck!
  - And we can go even deeper into breathing or *pranayama* practices as an aid to connect with the subtler levels of our experience, our spiritual nature, and connect with the Spirit of God inside us and all around us.

So in today's meditation, we'll introduce two specific breathing practices, and we invite you this week to try practicing whichever practices/combinations that appeal to you most – we're all unique and different-strokes-for-different-folks may apply here.

1. **Deep, Counting, Sensing, Single-Focus Breathing** (complicated name, simple practice!):
  - **Deepen your breath** – extend your exhale; after breathing out, push out a little extra air without forcing anything – a long slow full exhale. Then inhale normally and comfortably.
  - **Count** your inhale-exhale silently as "one", then again as "two", etc. See if you can make it up to ten rounds without losing your focus on the count.
  - **Sense** your breath – pay attention to what your inhales-exhales feel like, perhaps on the tips of your nostrils (e.g., cool on inhales and warm on exhales), in your throat, chest or belly.

- **Single-Focus** – you might be wondering “what good does it do to just sit here and watch my breathing?” Good question. If I said “focus on God’s presence” or “focus on your love for another person” chances are our attention during meditation would quickly wander elsewhere, to some other distracting thoughts. Without training, we don’t have great control over our attention, which is a really important resource, right? So beginning a meditation with a focus on our breath can be an effective way to train our mind to pay attention to just one object of focus (our breath in this case). It’s like lifting weights to get stronger or practicing the piano – some consistent daily practice improves our capacity to pay attention to our chosen object, whether in meditation or when focusing on any task at all.
2. **Centered Breathing:** (simpler name, more advanced practice): Imagine a thin pathway (like a thin drinking straw) just in front of your spine running straight up from your seat (where your bottom is resting on a chair or cushion) up to the crown/top of your head and curving forward to the center of your forehead, like an umbrella handle or a candy cane. As you begin your slow inhale, place your attention at the base of your spine/seat and imagine you’re traveling up this thin pathway to the crown of your head and then forward to your forehead center. Then as you slowly exhale imagine traveling in the reverse direction: from your forehead up to the crown of your head and down to your seat. Repeat. Keep your inhales/exhales long and deep. Have fun with this one, like a kid playing an imaginary game.

Final comment: Be very kind to yourself when cultivating a meditation practice. Please resist a self-critique of how it’s going. Do these meditations like a child playing and using her/his imagination. Don’t worry about “getting it right”. Just trust that a regular daily practice will bring familiarity like any other activity that we stick with. We become what we practice. Habits matter.

This is part two of our BBMI meditation practice. When we do it together, we’ll fit these Breathing practices into the sequence of our Body-Breath-Mind-Intention session. See you there!